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THE LANGUAGES OF SOUTHEASTERN ASIA

THOMAS A. SEBEOK
Princeton University

197 THE origin of the various languages of Southeastern Asia is veiled by the same mist, broken by only occasional glimmers of light, which hides from the ethnologist and even the historian the steps by which the territory was populated, its culture diffused. Nevertheless, a rough outline appears practicable.

Among the most ancient inhabitants of the area are the various tribes of Negritos, the Eta, the Semang, and the Andaman Islanders. One of their characteristics, in this region just as in Africa, seems to be that, with the exception of but one group, they everywhere abandoned their original language and adopted in its place that spoken by their respective neighbors, that is, the Sakai, Malayan, or African Negro dialects.

The one notable, and scientifically most valuable, exception is the language spoken by the Andaman Islanders. Excellent though the available ethnological material is, the linguistic reports are rather poor. So far as one can gather, there are two main groups of dialects: the languages spoken by the ten tribes of the Great Andaman; and the Önge language, spoken by the peoples of the South Andaman and the Little Andaman. For further information about them, the reader may refer with profit to A. R. Brown's "Notes on the languages of the Andaman Islands" (*Anthropos* 9 (1914), 36–52). Attempts were made, especially by Blagden, to discover remnants of an ancient Negrito vocabulary among the Semangs, and subsequently to compare these with Andamanese word lists—but these attempts have borne little fruit so far.

THE MON-KHMER LANGUAGES

The first Mongoloids to reach Southeastern Asia seem to have spoken a branch of the Mon-Khmer language family. The Semangs, pygmies of the Malay Peninsula, and the Sakai. another non-Malay group of the mainland, speak what appears to be the most archaic of all the Mon-Khmer tongues, even more so than the stilted forms of written Mon and Khmer. Other members of this family that survive to this day are: Khasi, spoken in Assam; Nicobarese, with half a dozen dialects, spoken in the Nicobar Islands; the languages spoken by some tribes along the basin of the Salween River,

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197 particularly the Palaung, Wa, and Riang; and finally the Mon-Khmer group proper.

The language of the Mon is spoken on the coast of the gulf of Pegu. Inscriptions date from as far back as the 11th century. They are in Myazediin script. Khmer is spoken in Cambodia, and its inscriptions are available from about the first half of the 7th century. There are also about a dozen other dialects spoken by scattered tribes throughout this area.

The Mon-Khmer languages are sometimes grouped together with Munda, a large family of languages spoken in the Northeastern sector of India today —but this is not supported by evidence. Similarly, it may be doubted if dialects of this language family have really spread into Yunnan in Southwest China. For example, Wen Yu showed recently that Min-chia, long held to have been a Mon-Khmer dialect, belongs in reality to Tibeto-Burman ("A study of synonyms in the Min-chia language," *Studia Serica* 1 (1940), 1–28). The term "Austroasiatic"—if it means more than just Mon-Khmer—covers a multitude of linguistic methodological sins. And if the existence of an "Austroasiatic" family of languages is doubtful, an "Austric" superstock, combining the former with Austronesian (Malayo-Polynesian), is much more improbable still. For further information on Mon-Khmer consult the writer's "Examination of the Austroasiatic language family" (*Language* 18 (1942), 206–17), which contains references as well as a lengthy list of languages, and further his "Bibliography of Mon-Khmer linguistics" (*Studies in Linguistics*, Vol. 1, No. 11, 1943).

It is only fair to point out, however, that in a recent paper, "Thai, Kadai, and Indonesian: A new alignment in Southeastern Asia" (*American Anthropologist* 44 (1942), 576–601), Paul Benedict attempted boldly to combine into a single language family Thai, Indonesian and "Kadai"—and further to add this hypothetical family to Mon-Khmer-Annamite, and in a further synthesis, Miao-Yao. "Kadai" is a new term of the author's for Kelao, Laqua, and Lati of the mainland, that is, in Southcentral China and the China-Tonkin border region, and Li of Hainan. This writer regards Benedict's interesting attempt with a good deal of scepticism, for the type of evidence he uses to prove his hypothesis is not altogether satisfactory. Further judgment may well be postponed until new and better material to work with has been collected.

THE INDONESIAN LANGUAGES

197 Indonesian (Malayan) is a family of languages spoken over an enormous
171 territory: the Malay Peninsula, the East Indies, the Philippine Islands,
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Madagascar, and Formosa. Furthermore, a distant but clear relationship exists between Indonesian on the one hand, and the Oceanic languages, Melanesian, Micronesian, Polynesian, on the other.

The dialect spoken on the mainland, around, say, Perak, is known simply as Malay; this is, moreover, something of a *lingua franca:* "bazaar" or "pidgin" Malay and is understood throughout the Indies, except in some of the interior districts.

The large number of dialects in this area—there are 87 in the Philippine Islands alone—cannot be accounted for in terms of separate waves of migrations, for ethnology recognizes no more than three major ones; the distinctions become less puzzling, however, if we consider the geographical factors which resulted in ethnic isolation of more or less small groups. Perhaps the most isolated, and hence the most divergent, dialects of Indonesian are spoken in Madagascar; the Hova dialect of the Malagasy group is the literary one.

The chief groups on the Philippine Islands are four: the Luzon group (chief dialects, Iloco, Ibanag, Apayao, Kalinga, Tingguian, Bontoc, Ifugao, Igorot, Ilongot, Tagalog), second, the Bisaya group (chief dialects, Cebu-Bisaya, Panay-Bisaya), third, Mindoro-Palawan (chief dialects, Mangyan, Kuyónon, Tagbanua), and finally, the Mindanao-Sulu group (chief dialects, Lanao, Magindanao, Subanon, Mandaya, Bagobo, Kulaman, Tiruray). For a map of distribution of these and other dialects see Herbert W. Krieger, "Peoples of the Philippines" (*Smithsonian Institution, War Background Studies No. 4*, Washington, 1942, Fig. 4).

Some of the dialects in the East Indies are as follows. Sumatra: Minangkabau, Karo and Toba (together known as Batak), Gayo, Kubu, etc. Mentawey is spoken on the island by that name. Dayak and Punan are spoken in Borneo. Java: Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese. Celebes: Toradja, Bulu, Tontemboan, Bugis, Makassa, Bareqe. Balinese is the language of Bali. There are a good many others as well.

Several members of the Indonesian family, Malay in particular, have been studied with more or less thoroughness. But the best material is in Dutch and available only with difficulty here. For an excellent recent contribution in America cf. the outline of Iloco (a Philippine dialect) syntax (*Language* 18 (1942), 193–200), by Leonard Bloomfield.

The empires of the Mon and the Khmer were shattered in relatively recent times by folks who spoke Burmese and Thai respectively. The speakers of these languages dominate Burma and Thailand today, and Mon-Khmer is rapidly disappearing.

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THE INDO-CHINESE LANGUAGES

197 Both these dialect groups belong to the Indo-Chinese family of languages.
184 Chinese, of course, is the best known member of this family. Thai, as far as evidence now indicates, may be said to be another member. Thai is generally divided into two groups, the Chuang group, spoken chiefly in Kwangsi and southern Kweichow and in parts of Hainan, and the Southwestern group.

This Southwestern group itself divides into several dialects. One of these is Shan, spoken in the Shan states of the north by about one million souls; some of whom inhabit parts of Yunnan province. The P'o, the Kamti, and related tribes also speak dialects of Shan. Ahom, formerly spoken throughout Assam, is another member of this Southwestern group. Tai Blanc, Nung, Tho, and others, form a third grouping, and are spoken in French Indo-China as well as the southwestern part of Kwangsi. Finally, and chiefly, there is Thai itself, the official language (Bangkok dialect) of Thailand, and its closest relative, Lao, spoken by the Laos of the North. The first Siamese writing that we possess dates from the period of the famous king Ram Gamheng, with inscriptions of the 13th century.

197 Some recent studies on certain aspects of Thai may be recommended to the interested reader: they are, "Types of reduplication in Thai" (*Studies in Linguistics*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1942), and "The use of numeral classifiers in Thai" (*Language* 18 (1942), 201–05), both by Mary Haas. The best short discussion of the position of Thai in the Indo-Chinese family may be found in the 1938–39 issue of the *Chinese year book*, by a very reliable scholar, Li Fang Kuei ("Languages and Dialects," pp. 43–51).

Annamese is another bone of contention between scholars. On the one hand stands Maspero, linking this group definitely with Thai, and on the other hand stands Przyluski, supported recently by Benedict, linking it with Mon-Khmer. That the latter are wrong and Maspero is right, as far as evidence now indicates, was demonstrated by the brilliant Chinese scholar Wen Yu ("On the kinship of the Annamitic language," *Meridio-Occidentale Sinense*, 1 (1940), 66–73). Wen Yu rightly rejects, and effectively, Przyluski's lexical and morphological arguments; then he shows that Maspero's phonological arguments can fully be supported from the morphology, concluding that "from morphological study the Annamitic is completely in harmony with the Thaic."

Tibeto-Burman seems to be another branch of the Indo-Chinese family. Among the languages of the Burman side is, of course, Burmese itself. About sixteen dialects of this language are spoken by approximately ten

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million people. Of Karen, a related language, there are some one and a half million still left, with about seventeen dialects. The Nosu (Lolo) may speak a related tongue: they occupy a large part of Yunnan, the northwest of Kweichow, and portions of southern Sikiang. Their position, however, is rather anomalous. 197

The Miao-Yao group is the most controversial of all the languages of this territory, as far as historical relationships go. It must be remembered throughout that the linguist's first task is to describe the languages of a given area. Only after careful and scientifically comparable records have been prepared must he make statements of a historical character. Since there are no reliable descriptions of the great majority—almost all—the languages of Southeastern Asia, every statement concerning relationships must be carefully and critically scrutinized before accepted. The Miao-Yao controversy is only one of those which may well be postponed until its dialects are adequately described.

The above is the merest sketch outlining the languages of Southeastern Asia: the list is by no means exhaustive; and the references are intended to guide the reader to further material. Paul Benedict gave his permission to this writer to announce that he will shortly publish a bibliography of Southeast Asiatic linguistics, devoted, however, mainly to dialects of the Tibeto-Burman stock, though also dealing with Thai, Miao-Yao, and "Kadai." The most complete list of books (but not of periodical literature) pertaining to the entire Southeast Asiatic field will be found in the appropriate section of Heine-Geldern and Poleman's *Selected list of books on India, Ceylon, Tibet, and Southeast Asia* to appear soon under the auspices of the American Council of Learned Societies.

From the point of view of practical considerations as distinct from scientific interests there are three languages in the territory under survey which are of primary importance: Malay, Thai, and Burmese. When the war in the Far East broke out the situation with regard to instruction in these languages, not to mention the others, was quite deplorable. In an important article (*Asia* 42. 375–78) in June 1942, Mortimer Graves wrote as follows: "Not one American is a recognized scholar in the field or equipped to teach Malay intensively for the emergency. Moreover, not only are there no teachers; there are none of the paraphernalia of instruction—no adequate grammars, dictionaries for students, books of readings, phonograph records and so on, which make possible the modern teaching of a language. . . . Even though Java has fallen, our relations with Malay-speaking peoples have just begun. Much the same is to be said about Thai, or Siamese," and, Mr. 000

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Graves might have added, about Burmese and all the other Southeast Asiatic languages as well.

COURSES NOW OFFERED

This writer is happy to report that the situation may be said to have definitely improved. To the best of his knowledge (this article was written in January, 1943-Ed. Note), the following courses in the languages of the area may now be taken or are about to be given.

Malay

1. Isidore Dyen offers an elementary course at Yale University. This course is especially noteworthy because the student divides his time equally between it and an ethnological course on Malaysia by Raymond Kennedy.
2. W. M. Senstius offers a course at the University of Michigan.
3. Claire Holt's course in Colloquial Malay is offered for the Navy only, at the School of International Administration of Columbia University.
4. George Devereux teaches an elementary course at the University of Wyoming.
5. Vernon E. Hendershot offers a course at Walla Walla College.
6. A course at the New York Berlitz School is given by Tassilo Adam.

Tagalog

1. Frank R. Blake announced a course, "given if requested," at the Johns Hopkins University.

Thai

1. Mary Haas teaches intensively an elementary and an advanced course at the University of Michigan.

Burmese

1. Preparations to offer a course are in progress at Yale University, to be given by W. Cornyn, under the direction of Leonard Bloomfield and the assistance of R. I. McDavid Jr.

The writer wishes to express his sincere thanks to the two sources whence he gathered the above data, and at the same time to direct the interested reader for further information to them. They are, first, a report prepared for the East Indies Institute of America by Dr. Robert Heine-Geldern, surveying Southeast Asiatic studies at American universities and colleges; and second, a report of the first year's operation of the intensive language program of the American Council of Learned Societies 1941–1942, prepared by Mortimer Graves and J. M. Cowan, published on December 20, 1942.

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THE INTENSIVE LANGUAGE PROGRAM

The Intensive Language Program calls for further comment. The details of the operation are in the hands of, Dr. Cowan, Secretary of the Linguistic Society of America, and two committees of the Council are in charge of its administration, namely, the Committee of the National School of Modern Oriental Languages and the Committee on Intensive Language Instruction. By definition of the committees, an intensive course "occupies the full time of the student, generally computed at about fifteen hours of classroom instruction, fifteen hours of drill with native speakers, and from twenty to thirty hours of individual preparation per week."

The essence of the program consists of the work with native speakers to whom the linguist refers as "informants." An informant is not a teacher but a storehouse of a set of linguistic habits which the trained student extracts, records, codifies, absorbs, and then transmits to other students. The informant will generally not possess a knowledge of the system of the language he speaks for he is not linguistically trained. It is the linguist who, after transcribing his utterances, arranges them in a pattern. There is a standard technique of phonetic recording and of the rearrangement of the material thus obtained into functional units which are easily teachable and scientifically comparable, and anyone can master it. The steps are explained in Leonard Bloomfield's *Outline guide for the practical study of foreign languages* and in Bernard Bloch and George I. Tragar's *Outline of linguistic analysis* (Linguistic Society of America, Baltimore 1942). The two booklets supplement each other. This method has been applied with considerable success to many languages, including Thai, Malay, Burmese, Ilocano, Tagalog, and so forth. Once an informant as well as a trained linguist to work with him, becomes available it is possible within a relatively short time to prepare the wherewithal for teaching the language intensively. In a field, like Southeast Asiatic linguistics, indeed no other method is possible under the present circumstances. Fortunately, Thai, Malay, and Philippine informants were found quite easily, though there was some trouble in getting a Burmese. So far no other languages of the area have been "implemented" in the way described largely because no informants are available in this country. It may be pointed out, by the way, that the grammars thus prepared are scientific and generally superior to those written by missionaries, government workers, or ethnologists.

A study of the languages of Southeastern Asia, provided the work is scientifically carried out, is of great importance apart from the practical urgency. Until the linguistic picture of the area is cleared up it is impossible

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000 to understand fully the history, the ethnology, the social anthropology not only of the Southeastern Asia and of Malaysia, but also of China and Japan. It was an outstanding ethnologist and Sinologue who said, with relation to China (Wolfram Eberhard, "Early Chinese cultures and their development: A new working hypothesis," *Smithsonian Report for 1937*, p. 530): "We must learn the true nature of the original relationship among the Austro-asiatic, the Austronesian, the Tibeto-Burman, and the Sino-T'ai groups of languages. Then only shall we be in a position to proceed further with our study."